

# **Seven Reasons Why Training Doesn't Produce the Desired Results and What You Can Do To Improve Your Results**

## **Overview**

Abraham Maslow said, "If the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail." As managers, leaders and change agents, we want to improve our organizational performance. Often training is seen as an important tool in this pursuit. Training is a fabulous tool! It can provide awareness, knowledge, skills and maybe even a chance to practice. However, all of our change efforts aren't nails, so training isn't our only tool. This special report identifies seven common reasons why training doesn't meet it's goals - even when it is the right tool - and more importantly - gives you some action steps to avoid these pitfalls.

## **1. The "Who's Accountable?" Game**

People rarely are held accountable for using what they learned in a course or workshop when they get back to the workplace. So some people recognize going to training as a game. That's why training is seldom seen (by anyone in the organization) as what it could and should be - a strategic part of the business, with responsibility for performance enhancement. Regardless of how training is viewed, if people aren't held accountable, how likely is it that real performance change will occur? All of the actions below will make accountability clear.

### **What You Can Do**

- Give people a clear message before participating in training what the expectations of them will be when they return.
- Plan some time with the participant both before and after the training session.
- Let participants know before they attend that an action plan is expected as a result of the training session. (Then be interested in the outcome.)
- Ask participants how you can help them reach their new performance goals.

## **2. The Cafeteria Cause - "Course du Jour"**

Often training has no connection to the strategic objectives of the organization. Whether true or not, the prevalent perception in the organization is that there is no rhyme or reason to the latest training course. This cause is called "Course du Jour" because often organizations offer new training just like some people try new diets. New business books (and accompanying "hot" new training

topics) are published with the frequency of new diet plans - and the similarities continue! With the fad popular diets, people hear about the new approach, buy the book, get excited, try the diet, and soon leave it - usually before they received any real benefit. The same thing happens in an organization. The new training topic, approach, idea or craze is tried and dropped before results can occur. There's usually nothing wrong with the training introduced, but usually it isn't supported in the organization - or given the *time* to work. In these instances, the company is wasting time and money, and confusing the majority of the employees. Maybe most costly however is the risk of fostering cynicism and reducing the credibility of leadership.

### **What You Can Do**

- Make training decisions based on strategic direction and real performance gaps. Once those training priorities have been set, stick to them.
- Make a commitment to get a return on that training investment.
- Resolve to give the training time and support to work.
- Determine clear performance outcomes for the effort up front.
- When a new "hot topic" training course is proposed, ask, "How does this fit with what we've been doing? Is this just our next diet?"
- Use real work in the training when possible.

### **3. The Piling on the Work Paradigm**

Many times managers and leaders see training as an expensive waste of time. When they attend classes, they continually think about all the work that is piling up "back in the office". Their employees see this attitude through their leader's actions. This thinking grows because leaders don't explain the reasons for the course and don't help people deal with the workload while they are gone. Since you can't *make* people learn, these situations can be disastrous in the training session itself. People may resent having to be in the training because they don't understand why they're there, and they know they'll have to work harder when they get back to the job to catch up. In this situation the participants may leave more cynical than when they arrived, with few if any new skills to counteract that possible effect.

### **What You Can Do**

- Do everything possible to make sure all of management is on-board with the training and its purpose.
- Make a commitment to get a return on that training investment.
- Resolve to give the training time and support to work.
- Determine clear performance outcomes for the effort up front.
- Set up a plan to handle the work while the participant is learning. This action speaks volumes about the importance of the training. It will also improve their ability to focus on the session (e.g. "My critical work is being handled", and "Whew, I'm sure glad that most of my mail will have been handled when I get back!").

#### **4. The January Third Application Assignment**

Well designed training with motivated learners will result in people leaving training with some clear ideas about how they plan to apply what they've learned back on the job. But well intentioned as those plans might be, they may be no more effective than most New Year's Resolutions. Old habits are hard to break! Habits are especially hard to break when there is no support for the new skills and behaviors back in the workplace.

### **What You Can Do**

- Give people a clear message before participating in training what the expectations of them will be when they return.
- Plan some time with the participant both before and after the training session.
- Let them know before they attend, that an action plan is expected as a result of the training session. (Then be interested in the outcome.)
- Ask them how you can help them reach their new performance goals. All of these actions will make accountability clear.
- Give an entire work group training in new information and skills at the same time. (Whenever possible and appropriate.)

- Use real work in the training when possible.

## **5. The Sleepwear Syndrome - "One-Size-Fits-All"**

Often times a T-shirt or sleepwear is designed to be "one size-fits-all" and serves its purpose. Training isn't sleepwear and probably won't be effective that way. Look at it this way: though all the teenage kids might wear one size of sweatshirt to school, would people wear the same size suit or skirt to work? If they did, would they look as good or perform well? In other words, one-size-fits-all garments aren't all that versatile for different situations. The basic goal of clothing - to cover our body and provide warmth - would be achieved, but many other reasons why we wear clothing would not be satisfied. The same is true for training in the workplace. Too often, generic, across-the-board training is administered. The basic premise with this syndrome is that "We'll give it to everyone - to be fair - maybe everyone doesn't need this information or lack the skills, but at least we will make sure we don't leave anyone out." In reality often management doesn't really know who needs the new skills and knowledge.

### **What You Can Do**

- Base training and participation decisions on skills needed to be effective in the workplace.

## **6. The Lone Ranger Situation**

Often people are sent to training as a perk, a reward, or as a way to get them in a new surrounding for awhile. In most cases, people in a team or work group may never all see the same training, except for the "Course du Jour" or "One-Size-Fits-All" variety. Some times people need specific skills to perform a specific part of their work. Often though, the "perk" training workshops are for skills many people in the group could use (or maybe they'll all be sent over-time; after all, everyone can't be gone at once). The result? People come back to work in a vacuum. Not only are they not accountable (Reason Number One above), but no one they work with has the same new skills and knowledge that they do. Without support, as a Lone Ranger, the new ideas they bring back may not get implemented due to peer resistance or ignorance.

### **What You Can Do**

- Give an entire work group training in new information and skills at the same time. (Whenever possible and appropriate.)
- Build training that is linked to the problems at work as well.
- Use real work in the training when possible.

## **7. The "Name That Tune" Game**

This problem arises when, in the name of expediency or efficiency, training time is compacted. Trainers are asked to "Name That Tune" (or complete the training) in shorter and shorter time blocks. This show starts with "The Management Team only needs an overview", and ends with training being designed to fit a time slot, as opposed to being designed to build specific skills. The typical result of the "Name That Tune - shorten the session for my people Game", is training that is little more than *exposure* to a topic area - not training which can transfer real skills, with real practice time in the classroom.

### **What You Can Do**

- Give the training staff some muscle - let them be strong advocates for training that is skill based, and not just meant to fill the ever-shortening time slot.
- Determine clear performance outcomes for the effort up front.

### **Final Thoughts**

Training can be expensive, often time consuming, and disappointing - both to the individuals and to the organization. Training and learning is also vitally important to the success of organizations. These Seven Reasons are often why training is so disappointing and time consuming. Taking the actions listed will help reduce the cost, lower the frustration and disappointment and drastically increase the effectiveness of the training in your organization.

The Discian Group is a learning consulting company, based in Indianapolis, Indiana that is committed to helping organizations, teams and individuals reach their performance goals through learning. If any of these reasons seem painfully familiar to you, you would like help in taking the actions described, are looking for training designed to help you take these actions, or are looking for other tools to put in your organizational learning toolkit, contact Kevin Eikenberry at 1.888.LEARNER (317.387.1424 outside the US) or via email at [kevin@discian.com](mailto:kevin@discian.com).